



# TENNESSEE REGULATORY AUTHORITY

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **TASK FORCE WANTS HIGH-SPEED INTERNET ACCESS FOR ALL TENNESSEANS**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Affordable high-speed Internet access is crucial to Tennessee's economic future, the health of its citizens and the education of its children, and it should be available to everyone in the state, a task force studying the issue reported today.

The Tennessee Broadband Task Force spent much of the last six months studying the deployment and access to high-speed Internet – or broadband.

"Every Tennessee home and business should have access to broadband service," said Rep. Mark Maddox, D-Dresden, who co-chaired the task force with Sen. Roy Herron, D-Dresden.

The General Assembly charged the task force with determining Tennessee's level of broadband availability. Broadband is used to describe almost any always-on, high-speed connection to the Internet. Broadband users can quickly view and download video and graphics, shop online or surf the Web. Students can take high school or college courses online. Rural physicians can get medical diagnoses from specialists while patients never leave home. Broadband will help Tennessee businesses compete with their global neighbors.

But broadband is not widely available in Tennessee, only one in four households has adopted it, which ranks the state 37<sup>th</sup> in the nation in usage. The United States ranks as low as 21<sup>st</sup> in the world in broadband usage. In Tennessee, the service most often is provided by local phone companies, such as BellSouth, or cable television providers, but the task force report recommends expansion to other potential providers to spur competition.

"The current level of broadband adoption in Tennessee is unacceptable," said Pat Miller, a task force member and a director of the Tennessee Regulatory Authority.

The report said, "Tennessee needs to make a purposeful effort to serve rural areas with broadband service. Until that occurs, Tennessee will lose ground—and jobs and educational opportunities—to states willing to make that commitment."

The report calls for a public-private partnership for developing a statewide plan for expanded broadband deployment and usage. A similar program in Kentucky raised broadband usage from 60 percent of that state's households in 2003 to 90 percent by the end of 2006.

"This world is becoming divided into the wired and the fired – those with broadband lines and those in unemployment lines," Herron said.

To view the Tennessee Broadband Task Force Report and Recommendations, visit TRA online at [www.state.tn.us/tra](http://www.state.tn.us/tra).

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